



FACT SHEET

Disease Prevention

for Parents and Childcare Providers

Handling Raw Meat and Eggs Safely

Bacteria in Raw Meat and Eggs

Raw meat and raw eggs can be a source of several disease-causing bacteria. These include *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and toxigenic *E.coli*. These bacteria come from the digestive tracts of animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, poultry, deer, and elk. The bacteria get on meat during the slaughter process. *Salmonella* may also be found inside eggs.

Children, Babies, and Disease

Children, especially babies, have the highest rate of disease caused by these bacteria than any other age group. They are more susceptible to illness caused by these bacteria, and are more likely to develop complications requiring hospitalization. These complications can include dehydration, convulsions, septicemia (blood poisoning), reactive arthritis, and meningitis (inflammation of brain and nerves). A complication of toxigenic *E.coli* infection, called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome, can cause kidney failure and death and is most common in children and the elderly. Given the possible severity of these diseases, it is very important for caregivers to protect babies and children by handling raw meat and eggs safely.

Cooking

The best way to protect children is to feed only foods that have been cooked thoroughly. Cooking to the right temperature will kill these bacteria.

- Cook poultry (chicken, turkey, duck), game meat (including jerky and ready to eat sausage), and stuffed meats, pasta, or other products to a minimum internal temperature of 165° F for 15 seconds.
- Cook ground, injected, or tenderized beef or pork to a minimum internal temperature of 160° F for 15 seconds.
- Cook fish, beef, or pork muscle meat that has not been tenderized or injected to a minimum internal temperature of 145° for 15 seconds.
- Cook eggs until firm, to a minimum internal temperature of 160° F.

Over ⇒

Thermometers

There are several types of affordable, probe type thermometers available at the grocery or specialty store. Some of these can be calibrated for accuracy by placing the thermometer in ice water and adjusting the dial by the nut on the back to 32° F. To take temperatures, stick the thermometer into the center of the food.

Cross Contamination -- Hands and Surfaces

Another important way to protect children from disease is to be very careful not to cross contaminate. Cross contamination is taking bacteria from dirty surfaces or dirty hands and putting them onto food or clean surfaces, dishes, or hands. Bacteria then end up being consumed, often times by children.

Some bacteria are very hardy and may survive or even grow on surfaces. If bacteria from meat or egg juices get on hands, dishes, or utensils, they can be spread around the kitchen or other areas. To avoid cross contamination:

- Wash hands thoroughly after touching raw meat or eggs, even the outside of packages, and before touching anything else (this includes the telephone, refrigerator door, cabinet doors, drawers, people).
- Make sure that any dishes, countertops, cutting boards, or utensils that have touched raw meat or eggs or their juices are washed thoroughly before coming into contact with anything else, particularly cooked or ready to eat foods.

Cross Contamination -- Food Storage

Bacteria in blood or juices may also drip from raw meats, even packaged products, or from cracked eggs onto other foods. If the food that has been dripped on is not then cooked to a high enough temperature or is not cooked at all, illness may result. To avoid this type of cross contamination:

- Keep raw meat and eggs separate from all other food while shopping. Pick up packaged raw meats in a plastic bag to help keep hands clean and to help contain any leaks. Check eggs before purchasing to be sure that none are broken.
- Store raw meats and eggs below all other food in the refrigerator. This will protect other food if something leaks. If this is not possible, store raw meat and eggs in a deep container with a locking lid to prevent any contact with other food.

Prevention

Young children are completely dependent upon their caregivers to protect them from foodborne disease. Illnesses from raw meat and eggs are preventable if care is taken while purchasing, storing, handling, and cooking these foods.

Please contact the Health Department at (406) 447-8352 with any questions that you may have.